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# Judaism and the Industrial Crisis

By DR. SIDNEY E. GOLDSTEIN

Free Synagogue

THE teachings of Judaism concerning industry and industrial problems are derived from the preaching of the prophets and also from the codes of Israel. We recognize the prophets as the earliest protagonists of social reform; but to the principles these teachers announce must be added the less known laws and commands found in the many codes Israel has constructed for guidance in the affairs of life. Both the laws of the codes and the principles of the prophets are, however, in turn the outgrowth of two fundamental facts, first, a passion for justice that is central to the faith of Israel; and second, a world experience that extends over forty centuries—an experience that has brought Israel into contact with many forms of life, nomad, agricultural and urban; with many systems of legislation, secular and sacred; with many different conceptions of civilization, in Asia, Africa, Europe and America. Out of this passion, unabated and unimpaired, enriched and intensified rather by our contacts and coöperations and conflicts with other social groups and conceptions of life, we have formulated our social program.

## FREEDOM

Israel began its history as a people with the Exodus. The escape from Egypt, the house of bondage, the miraculous emancipation from industrial servitude, has never faded from the heart of Israel. From year to year we recall this providential experience and reaffirm our faith in the lesson of freedom. No man shall live in slavery to his brother. Tyranny and autoc-

racy are intolerable in human society. All men must be free, free to determine the conditions under which they are to live and to work.

The present attempt of small groups of men to deny to the mass of workers the right to organize in their own way, to elect and to speak through their own representatives, to decide for themselves the terms of employment, is violative of the elementary right of freedom. Judaism protests against the policy of the United States Steel Corporation because the chairman of the Executive Committee and his associates have established in the steel industry a state of industrial autocracy. They presume to dictate to three hundred thousand workers, over a million men, women and children, the conditions of labor and the standards of life. Judaism sympathizes with and supports the steel worker because we know from our own experience that not until the power of the Pharaohs has been broken will men be free to march forward to the land of promise. The people may perish in the wilderness, but it is far better to die in freedom than to live in slavery.

## HEALTH

Another principal cardinal in Judaism is the sanctity of human life. This teaching is emphasized in every code and in every command. Human life must be guarded and preserved. Industry must be so organized and conducted that it will not endanger the life of men and women. Occupational diseases must be eliminated, industrial accidents must be prevented. The crippling of workers and the under-

mining of health is inexcusable. But more than this, industry must be so developed that it will promote and advance human life. Tuberculosis is a case in point. Tuberculosis is a disease of low resistance. The chief way to raise the resistance of men and women is to raise the standard of living. The chief way to raise the standard of living is to increase the income of the working class. The sudden drop in the mortality rate from tuberculosis during the last four years is due in part to campaigns of education, in part to reduced immigration, in part to the influenza epidemic that carried away many who would have died of tuberculosis, but the largest factor of all is the improved economic status of the laboring classes. To permit a form of industrial organization that jeopardizes life and that makes it impossible to outgrow the plagues that follow upon lowered resistance, physical and mental, is contrary to the teachings of Judaism that life is sacred and that it is our sacred duty to preserve and to promote the health of men and women and children.

### REST

The third principle is found in the command to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. In the Deuteronomic interpretation the reason given for the Sabbath is rest: rest from labor for the manservant, for the cattle and for the stranger within the gates, as well as for the master of the household. But back of this Commandment there is a larger thought that is developed through the literature of Israel. Every man and woman must be assured the opportunity for rest and refreshment of both body and spirit. Judaism is not committed to the eight-hour day nor to the six-hour day, but it is committed, and this irrevocably, to the full development of all our powers,

physical, mental and spiritual. No industry is properly organized that works men to the point of weariness and fatigue and exhaustion. No industry is organized in accordance with the teachings of Judaism that makes it impossible for the men engaged therein to increase knowledge and to cultivate character. The less time men spend in the darkness of the mine and the sweat of the factory and the monotony of the mill, the more time will these men have to spend in the library, the museum, the art gallery and the chamber of music. The invention of machinery must mean not greater profit for the employer and greater slavery for the worker, but the saving of hours and the release of energy for the cultivation of higher graces that come with education and culture and comradeship. These graces every man and woman should enjoy, not as a grant, but, according to the teachings of Judaism, as an inalienable and unquestioned right.

### WORK

The importance and dignity of labor is the fourth thought constantly stressed in the Jewish faith. An ancient tale tells us that when God told Adam and Eve the earth would bring forth thorns and thistles they wept: when He added they would eat their bread in the sweat of their brow, they laughed and rejoiced. Nowhere is this teaching concerning the place that labor holds in the economy of human life so finely expressed as in the Apocryphal Book of Ben Sirach:

Let us now praise famous men,  
Even the artificer and workmaster  
That passeth his time by night as by day;  
And is wakeful to finish his work.  
So is the smith sitting by the anvil,  
And considering the unwrought iron:  
The vapor of the fire wasteth his flesh,  
And in the heat of the furnace doth he  
wrestle with his work.

All these put their trust in their hands,  
 And each becometh wise in his own work,  
 Yea, though they be not sought for in  
 the council of the people,  
 Nor be exalted in the assembly;  
 Yet without these shall not a city be  
 inhabited,  
 Nor shall men sojourn or walk up and  
 down therein,  
 For these maintain the fabric of the  
 world,  
 And in the handiwork of their craft is  
 their prayer.

Any system of industry and industrial management that robs men of this sense of pride and joy in their own work and that fails to kindle in them the creative instinct and to inspire them with the service they are rendering society is contrary to the teachings of the Jewish faith.

#### FAIRNESS

The injunction against false balances, many times repeated in the codes of Israel, contains the fifth principle that applies to industry. There must be no defrauding, no exploitation, no profiteering. The consumer must be protected against the greed of the manufacturer and the merchant. The coal industry is here an illustration. It is difficult to ascertain the facts at present, but this much is clear, that those who control the mining and the transportation and the distribution of coal as a commodity have multiplied the unnecessary stages through which it must pass to such an extent that the increase in cost between the mine and the household is nothing less than exploitation and robbery. The difference between the cost of mining a ton of coal and the cost of delivery at the household cannot be explained in any other manner. It is a common excuse of the coal operators and their associates that the increase in cost is chargeable to labor. To charge the cost of coal to labor is an unwarrantable

deception on the part of the operators. When labor is granted or wins an increase of 10 per cent in wages, the coal operators and the merchants add 30 per cent or 40 per cent to the cost of coal. A fair charge for service is reasonable and right, but an artificial and extortionate charge is a gross violation of the teaching of Judaism.

#### COMMON OWNERSHIP

In the prophetic passage "Woe to those who join house to house and lay field unto field" is expressed the sixth principle that we emphasize. This passage is often quoted as a protest against monopoly, and that it is; but to those acquainted with the history of property and property rights in Israel, it contains a vaster message. The early Hebrews did not believe in the private ownership of land and water sources of food supply. No individual could claim title to the pasture land, the wells and springs and the trees from which the community as a whole nourished itself. The title rested not with man but with God. The earth is the Lord's and all that is therein. Man is merely the trustee and custodian of what he holds. The resources of the world, in other words, must be used not selfishly for the enrichment of a few, but wisely in the service of all. The machinations of small groups today to control the wealth of the earth is contrary to the highest teachings of Judaism. One-tenth of the population must not possess nine-tenths of the treasures of the world. The community as a whole must own and control those great reservoirs of wealth upon which all men are ultimately dependent for their existence and progress.

A fundamental error of the present day is that we are organizing industry in accordance with the so-called laws of economics rather than in keeping

with the principles of ethics. We are still under the unhappy spell of the teachings of the economists of the last generation. Francis Walker in his *Political Economy*, a book that became the economic Bible of those in control of our economic life, says quite frankly: "The boundary line between ethical and economic inquiry is perfectly clear. The economist, as such, has nothing to do with the question whether existing institutions are right or wrong." Judaism does not accept this teaching. We do not admit that the law of supply and demand is the last word in business and industry. It leads to unjust prices and to exploitation. No law can be final that leads to injustice. Judaism does not accept the doctrine of competition. It leads to unnecessary and unworthy struggle and strife and suffering in human relationships. Men are not to compete with each other for personal gain, but are to coöperate with each other for the common good. The whole science of economics needs to be reconstructed in accordance with ethics before it can serve as a guide in industry and commerce and finance. Judaism in-

sists and has never ceased to teach the truth that not economics but ethics constitute the organic law of social life.

#### RELIGION

The ultimate test of industry, Judaism teaches, is religious. How far and how fast does our present industrial system further the Kingdom of God? How fast is it inaugurating the age when injustice and oppression and misery will no longer be a part of our social life? How far is it advancing the new order when every man, woman and child will rejoice in the fullness of strength, the widest development of mind and the highest cultivation of the spirit? This function industry cannot achieve until it organizes to do two things: First, to adequately maintain all those who labor, for the first charge upon industry is not dividends but the welfare of the workers; second, to serve society, for the primary purpose of industry is not to create profits but to meet the needs of men, to free them and to equip them for the larger life that is to be shared by all those who enter the Kingdom of God.